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Montana SCHOOLS

Special Issue
May 2000

Newsletter of the Montana
Office of Public Instruction
Nancy Keenan, Superintendent
Vol. 43, No. 3

*This is a special issue dedicated to the
process of implementation the Montana
Content and Performance Standards
in local school districts*

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questions that are frequently
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cooperatively on curriculum
alignment.

And more ...

Standards in Action

Implementing the Montana Content and Performance Standards

In any profession, standards
define quality, excellence,
and proficiency. In the
construction industry,
standards are developed to make
sure buildings are safe and solid.
In education, standards are
designed to make sure students
have the skills and knowledge
they need for the next step in their
lives, whether it's a job or further
education.

Standards framework in place

This fall — after years of work
on the part of Montana's educa-
tors, parents, and community
members — the State Board of
Public Education (BPE) will
review and adopt content and
performance standards for the
final four of 11 content areas. At
that point, Montana will have a
framework of challenging aca-
demic standards in place for all
basic subjects such as reading,
mathematics, technology, science,
writing, and social studies.

But the work does not end with
the adoption of content and
performance standards. In fact,
the opposite is true. State Superin-
tendent Nancy Keenan explains,
"We are now at the crux of our
work. We need to make sure our
new standards don't just sit and
gather dust, but actually improve
teaching and learning in
Montana's classrooms."

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—State Superintendent
Nancy Keenan

Implementing standards at the local level

Implementing the new stan-
dards — making sure they are
reflected in local curriculum,
assessments, materials, and
teaching practices — is an enor-
mous and somewhat daunting
task. Since Montana's school
system is built upon the firm
belief that final decisions on
educational matters should rest
with local educators and commu-
nity members, it is also work that
must be done at the local level.

As a result, the standards do not
tell local educators how to teach;



Montana's state standards were written by teachers from across the state. Here
three members of a group, which gathered in Helena to discuss and draft
performance standards and benchmarks for the communication arts, are hard at
work.

rather, they function as a structure
from which local curriculum can
be developed or revised, orga-
nized, implemented, and as-
sessed.

Linda Vrooman Peterson,
Director of the School Improve-
ment Division at the Office of
Public Instruction (OPI), explains,
"On most journeys, you can reach
the same destination by several
different routes. Montana's
standards set the destination and
the benchmarks. But local school
districts need to work with
parents, teachers, and community
members to decide which route—
which curriculum and teaching
methods — they deem best for
their students."

School districts have until July
2004 to align their curricula to the

statewide content and performance
standards, and many local educators
are immersed in the process. So, how is
the journey toward standards imple-
mentation going in Montana? What
routes have local school districts
chosen? What vehicles are they using?
What are some of their experiences
and what difficulties have they en-
countered along the way?

Telephone survey collects information

In order to understand how school
districts are approaching the task of
reviewing their local curriculum and
aligning it to the new standards, OPI
staff interviewed 14 individuals
directly involved with implementing
state standards in their district.

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Riverside Publishing Company selected to provide test for Montana's schools

In school year 2000-2001,
Montana schools will be using
the Iowa Test of Basic Skills
(for students in grades 4 and 8)
and the Iowa Test of Educational
Development (for students in
grade 11) to meet the Board of
Public Education (BPE) require-
ment to test students in grades 4,
8, and 11 in reading, mathematics,
science, communication arts, and
social studies.

Award process

In December, a Request for
Proposals (RFP) was issued for
the assessment components of the
Montana Coordinated Compre-
hensive Assessment System. An

eight-member Evaluation Team
reviewed the proposals submitted, and
recommended Riverside Publishing
Company's proposal to State Superin-
tendent Nancy Keenan.

On April 27, 2000, the BPE met in
conference call and approved the use
of the tests proposed by Riverside
Publishing. Riverside Publishing
Company and the Office of Public
Instruction (OPI) are currently negoti-
ating a contract for products and
services to provide and score the tests.

More information

A description of the process that led
to the development and award of the
RFP is available on OPI's Web site at
<<http://www/mctnet.state.mt.us>>. ■

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Message from Nancy Keenan

Standards set for local implementation

Since 1997, we have engaged in a broad-based, inclusive, and collaborative process to build content and performance standards for Montana schools. As a result of tremendous teamwork among the Board of Public Education, teachers, administrators, parents, professional associations, the OPI staff and education professionals from across Montana, these standards are now available to Montana school districts.

The Montana Board of Public Education has adopted content and performance standards for Montana schools in seven areas: reading, mathematics, communication arts, health enhancement, science, technology, and world languages. By the end of 2000, we anticipate approval in the areas of social studies, arts, workplace competencies, and library media.

I am proud of these standards and of the effort and initiative of all the people who have worked to create them. The challenge before us now is implementation of these content and performance standards in each of our school systems across the state. The School Improvement Program



is strongly based on the foundation of local school district control. The value of the standards will be derived through their implementation and use in the schools and classrooms across the state.

This issue of Montana Schools features stories from Montana districts who are already using the standards in their education strategy. The stories and the people who tell them highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by school systems working to implement the standards. Each district in Montana has the latitude to determine how to effectively meet their students'

needs in line with expectations set out in the standards. Each district will hopefully gain insight and inspiration through their efforts to implement the standards. In addition it is my hope that we can learn from each other by sharing both successes and challenges as we work together on the school improvement process.

One message we hear loud and clear from districts across the state is their need for professional development resources – both opportunities and time. Educators need the tools and the resources to meet the challenge of school improvement; reviewing standards, selecting curriculum, designing teaching strategy, and utilizing classroom and statewide assessment instruments to measure progress. In our fast-paced technological society, how we learn and how we teach changes constantly. Highly trained, motivated teachers are the vital link in improving Montana's schools. Professional development is an important component in successful education. I firmly believe that an investment in Montana's teachers is an investment in Montana's future.

I urge all districts to participate in a professional development institute, "Implementing Standards In The Classroom... & All That Jazz!!!", sponsored by MASCD, MREA, Helena Public Schools and OPI, offered June 12 through 15 in Helena. This will be a terrific opportunity to share ideas, questions and experiences with other Montana educators as we move along the path to maintaining and improving Montana schools.

Resources for professional development are among my top priorities for funding in the upcoming 2001 session. The OPI legislative budget request is currently being drafted with my top three priorities – K-12 BASE aid funding, educator professional development, and the school improvement initiative.

I welcome your ideas and suggestions on how OPI can best serve you in your school improvement efforts – standards implementation, assessment and professional development. Thank you for your dedication to improving Montana schools and for the high standards you set every day for your students and in your communities.

Nancy Keenan

Standards Framework Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Montana revising standards?

The Montana Standards Framework establishes a common set of state standards to improve student learning for all. Setting high standards for learning provides clear expectations for students, schools, and communities; establishes a yardstick for how good is good enough; allows focused decision-making based on common information; and guides the direction for change and future needs.

The standards provide the structure from which districts develop, revise, organize, implement, and assess local curriculum. The standards are the basis for the development of the state, local, and classroom comprehensive, balanced, and aligned assessment system.

It has been ten years since the model learner goals were developed. Standards revision is needed because over the past ten years we have learned from research and practice about standards-based education, methods to improve teaching and learning, how children learn, and implementation of federal requirements for comprehensive standards. Montanans don't want separate standards for Title I students, Special Education students, gifted and talented students, and still another set for general education. Montanans want a common set of standards for all students.

What is the Montana Standards Framework?

The Standards Revision Process builds a framework of the common set of standards for all Montana students. It defines the general knowledge of what all students should know, understand, and be able to do in each subject area and sets specific expectations for student learning at three benchmarks along the K-12 continuum. These benchmarks are at the end of fourth grade, eighth grade, and upon graduation. Performance standards describe student achievement at each of these benchmarks at four performance levels: advanced, proficient, nearing proficiency, and novice. The content standards, benchmark expectations, and corresponding performance levels provide teachers, parents, students, and the public with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and how well they are able to apply their learning.

Are the standards a state curriculum?

No, the Board of Public Education (BPE) and the Office

of Public Instruction (OPI) are not developing a statewide curriculum. Curriculum, instructional strategies, culturally rich materials, and aligned classroom assessment is most appropriately developed and modified at the local level.

When local teachers in partnership with administrators, parents, and community develop curriculum, the ownership, knowledge, and commitment to implementation of standards is strengthened. Montana wants guidance and leadership from the state, not top-down mandates or cookie-cutter curricula.

When are school districts expected to align their local curriculum?

Beginning with school year 1998-99, the content and performance standards supersede model learner goals. School districts are expected to align their curricula to the state content and performance standards by July 1, 2004.

What does alignment mean?

Alignment means to match the content of the written curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment to the standards, making adjustments to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet the standards.

How will OPI provide assistance to school districts?

Implementation is a key component of the School Improvement Initiative. The standards written and approved are only as good as they provide meaningful structure around which local curriculum is developed or revised, organized, implemented, and assessed. The OPI, in partnership with the BPE and representatives from Montana's education community, is facilitating a process to design a statewide implementation plan. The implementation plan will provide a statewide coordinated professional development delivery system, resources, and ongoing support for the meaningful use and evaluation of the content and performance standards.

Will professional development opportunities be part of the implementation plan?

Yes. A comprehensive professional development model is currently under construction. Through coordination and collaboration, the BPE, professional education organizations, tribal education, higher education, OPI, and other interested parties established the Montana Education Stakeholders. The Education Stakeholders Collaborative guides and coordinates the statewide professional development model, which will provide strategic approaches to implementing the

(continued on page 7)

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Standards in Action, cont.

The interviewees were selected to achieve a rough cross section of schools in Montana; the list includes schools of all sizes and geographic locations along with two consortiums. (See the list on the right.)

Each interview was conducted over the phone and each person was asked to comment on the following five points:

1. What effective strategies are you using to align your local curriculum with the standards?
2. Please share your observations about the implementation process in your district.
3. What are some of the implementation activities that your district has completed or plans to complete by the end of the school year? By the end of the summer?
4. What are some specific challenges you face or anticipate during this process?
5. How can the OPI School Improvement Team support your district's implementation of and alignment with the standards?

What are school districts doing
Although some are further along than others, all of the school districts interviewed are engaged in some form of curricular review. Many have finished work on their reading and mathematics curricula and are addressing science, health enhancement, and the communication arts. Others — Polson and Kalispell, for example — are using their curriculum review as a springboard to address assessment and materials selection.

Some of the larger districts hired curriculum coordinators to guide this process, while most smaller districts joined a consortium to accomplish this task. In every district, however, local teachers are carrying out the actual work of curriculum review and revision.

Increased professional development for teachers

Almost everyone we talked to felt that the task of aligning their local curriculum to the standards brought important side benefits to education in their district.

It creates an opportunity for teachers to discuss what's going on in their classrooms. Diane Fladmo, Prairie View Cooperative, said, "I've heard many times from teachers that they really enjoy having the opportunity to interact with their subject peers."

Mike Williams, who is Superintendent for the Terry Schools and coordinates the curriculum work for the Prairie View

Cooperative, agreed. He recalled a fourth-grade teacher who said that the process had allowed her to sit down with another fourth-grade teacher and discuss what she was doing — for the first time in 24 years of teaching.

Fergus County Superintendent Shirley Barrick is responsible for four, rural, one-teacher schools in her county. Barrick's schools have joined forces with the Montana Small School Alliance, an experience that she finds very beneficial for her teachers.

"We're very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with a group of other rural teachers," says Barrick. "My schools here are pretty scattered, and the teachers don't get to visit each other very often. They don't get to have that dialogue like a group of teachers in a building."

In addition to increased opportunity for teachers to connect with each other, working closely with standards, benchmarks, curriculum, and classroom instruction has given educators a greater understanding of curriculum development.

Barrick says, "Giving teachers in these

small rural areas grassroots training in how schools change their curricula is very worthwhile. I'm not too sure how much curriculum work they did in their teacher preparation classes."

The process of alignment and review has also allowed teachers to consider the ways the material they cover in their classrooms relates to and intersects with the instruction that students receive in other classrooms and grade levels.

In some districts, it was the first time many teachers were asked to review their lesson plans and course outlines systematically and compare them to local curricular goals and the state standards. It also spurred many teachers to actually sit down and read through the standards.

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Montana Standards Revision: Phases and Cycles

Phases	Research	Writing & Revision	Adoption & Distribution	Professional Development	Implementation
Cycle 1: Reading and Mathematics	Finished	Winter 1998	Fall 1998	Starting in Winter 1999 and Ongoing	Starting in Winter 1999 and Ongoing
Cycle 2: Communication Arts, Health Enhancement, Science, Technology, and World Languages	Finished	Summer to Fall 1998	Fall 1999	Starting in Winter 2000 and Ongoing	Starting in Winter 2000 and Ongoing
Cycle 3: Social Studies, Arts, Work Place Competencies, Library Media	Winter 1999	Summer to Fall 1999	Fall 2000	Starting in Winter 2001 and Ongoing	Starting in Winter 2001 and Ongoing

Implementing Standards in the Classroom ... and all that Jazz MASCD Summer Institute 2000 scheduled for June 13-15

This year, when educators gather for the annual Montana Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (MASCD) Summer Institute, they will concentrate on aligning their school district's curriculum and classroom instruction to the Montana Content and Performance Standards.

The institute design Scheduled for June 13-15 in Helena, the institute — titled *Implementing Standards in the Classroom ... and all that Jazz* — will be a hands-on workshop for school or district teams of two or more educators with a focus on the alignment of their local curriculum in a specific content area — such as

reading, mathematics, or science — to the state standards.

"This is brand new for many Montana school districts and educators," says Linda Vrooman Peterson, who leads the School Improvement Division at the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). "Understanding the various tasks that alignment encompasses and learning effective strategies to accomplish them are key professional development needs."

Because each school district in Montana is responsible for its own curriculum, however, it is equally important to support district personnel as they do the work. "We hope the design of this institute will address both needs," states Peterson.

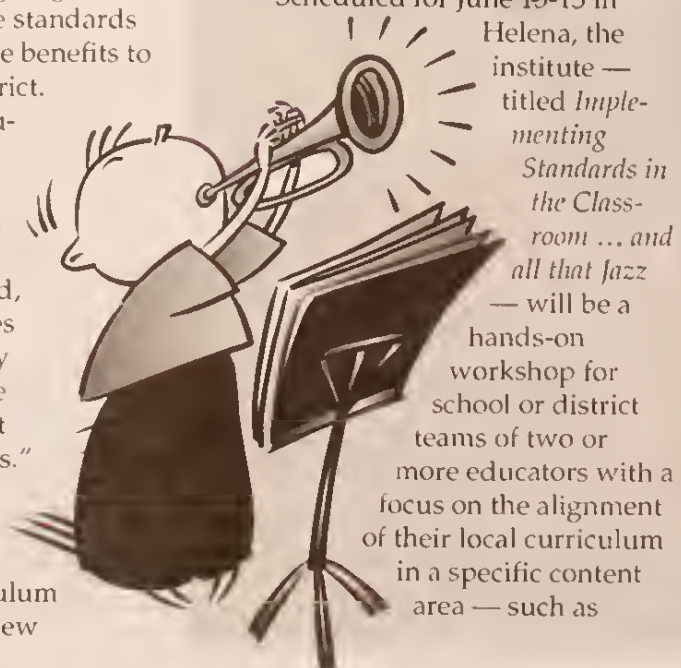
Participants will listen to expert advice from Lisa Carter on instructional alignment and, then, actually work through the steps of aligning their district's curriculum to the new state standards in one content area.

In addition to Carter, facilitators will be available to work with individual teams, so that

Individuals Interviewed

- Dave Zorn, Curriculum Director, Kalispell
- Alicia Moe, Curriculum Director, Great Falls
- Mary Johnson, Assistant to the Superintendent, Browning
- Al McMillan, Superintendent, Laurel
- Sue McCormick, Curriculum Director, Polson
- Carl M. Somers, Superintendent, Fort Benton
- Dan Martin, Principal, Plentywood High School
- Bruce Morrison, Superintendent, Heart Butte
- Michael Williams, Superintendent, Terry
- Jule Walker, Superintendent, Ekalaka

- John Babcock, Superintendent, Cayuse Prairie
- Shirley Barrick, Fergus County Superintendent
- Diane Fladmo, Coordinator, Prairie View Special Services Cooperative
- Fred Seidensticker, Director, Golden Triangle Curriculum Cooperative



participants can address the needs their districts have targeted in the content area they have chosen.

Lisa Carter, featured presenter

Lisa Carter began her career as an elementary school teacher in North Carolina. She has served as an administrator at both the elementary and secondary levels and worked in rural and urban schools.

In recent years, Carter helped establish the Mayerson Academy for Human Resource Development in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is nationally recognized for its outstanding work in the professional development of teachers and administrators.

Today, Carter continues to work closely with the Academy as Lead Trainer. She now consults nationally with schools and school districts interested in improving in the areas of effective schools, effective teaching, leadership development, and instructional alignment.

(Continued on page 8)

State academic standards provide foundation and focus

Although school districts are required to align their local instructional practices with the state standards adopted by the Montana Board of Public Education (BPE), those standards do not constitute a statewide curriculum. Rather, they form a strong academic foundation upon which school districts and communities can build their own local curriculum.

It makes sense

This structure is solidly based on both research and common sense. To have an impact on student learning, the standards need to be implemented at the local level. Allowing local educators, parents and communities to develop the curriculum, instructional strategies, and aligned classroom assessment that best fits their local priorities and their students' needs only makes sense.

As Laurel Superintendent Al McMilan states, "Each learning culture is unique and what works in Plentywood may not work in Laurel."

When local teachers — together with administrators, parents, and community members — develop curriculum, the process strengthens the ownership and commitment to implementing the standards.

It also allows communities to align state cultural standards into their local curriculum. In Browning, for example, the

Cultural Subcommittee has been working in conjunction with the other subject committees to create culturally appropriate lessons.

Helping provide a focus for curriculum review

Local school districts regularly undertake curriculum review, and the state standards can aid that process.

Great Falls Curriculum Director Alicia Moe says, "We are not driven by the standards, but rather are focused by them. The standards have really helped us focus on all kids."

Laurel's McMilan agrees. "The standards came along just at the right time because it gives us a perfect starting point for what we as a district identified as a long-range goal." ■

Community and teacher involvement essential

Implementing the state standards offers educators exciting possibilities to review their teaching practices and update their subject matter. Change, however, can be hard.

Ownership necessary to lasting change

Lasting change is accomplished by individuals who understand and feel an ownership in the process. (See article on page 7.) But, how does one create that sense of ownership?

"There isn't anything magic," says Laurel Superintendent Al McMilan. "Ownership takes time, and it takes involvement."

Motivating people is often a product of including and informing. "We've spent a lot of time 'dialoging' with our teachers, community, and board about what we're doing," says McMilan. "There are always going to be some that don't get on board, but we have good buy-in. We have, in effect, created a process that involves, not just checks on or checks with. It's made all the difference."

A 'participative process'

In Polson, the implementation process emphasizes dialogue, understanding, and participation. After a work meeting, each member of a curriculum area team is responsible for taking the salient points of that meeting back to their building and facilitating a dialogue with the other teachers.

"Using the participative process takes longer in the beginning, but the end result is that people understand the task far better, and they can see their ideas represented in the framework," says Curriculum Director Sue McCormick.

Polson has also extended the process beyond the school doors by forming community advisory teams. Team members include parents, representatives of all groups involved in education, and other key opinion leaders. Their presence allows for increased communication and community input and involvement in the curriculum review process.

Making parents part of the process

This past fall, the Browning school district offered parents 16 hours of training in curriculum, standards, and assessment. During parent-teacher conferences, parents asked teachers questions about how their classroom activities and assessments related to the local curriculum.

"The feedback from parents was pretty amazing," said Assistant to the Superintendent Mary Johnson. "They said things like, 'This is the first time we have known what our kids need to know at every grade level.'" The teachers, she said, were surprised that parents came in and "spoke the language," although they did know about the class.

The parents' interest has helped reinforce the connection between curriculum work, classroom instruction, and student achievement. Johnson believes that is key to school improvement.

"Every teacher has to be very very familiar with the whole process, the product, and the reason behind it," she says. "We need to make sure our work equates to improved learning and higher achievement."

That is something on which everyone — teachers, administrators, community members, and parents — can agree. ■

Curriculum Connections

Reading

Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, and respond to what they read.

By the end of grade 4, students will:

1. Make predictions and connections between new material and previous information/experiences.
2. Incorporate new print/nonprint information into existing knowledge to draw conclusions and make application.
3. Provide oral, written, and/or artistic responses to ideas and feelings generated by reading material.
4. Demonstrate basic understanding of main ideas and some supporting details.
5. Accurately retell key elements of appropriate reading material.

Performance Standard:

Proficient fourth grade students demonstrate an overall understanding of the reading material, providing inferential as well as literal information. They apply reading strategies and methods when reading content area material.

Curriculum Connection Grade 4

To manage ideas and information a student will:

- determine main and supporting ideas using prior knowledge, predictions, connections, inferences, visual and auditory cues.
- organize information in logical sequences using a variety of strategies: webbing, outlining, mapping.

"Ghost Boy" Born in San Diego

When Banjeeri, a koala, gave birth to a baby at the San Diego Zoo last September, zoo keepers didn't notice anything unusual.

The baby koala immediately crawled into his mother's pouch before zookeepers could look at him. Six months later, zookeepers were surprised when the zoo's newest koala finally came out of his mother's pouch.

A nice surprise: Koalas are marsupials. A marsupial is an animal whose females have a pouch to carry their babies. Kangaroos are also marsupials.

When Banjeeri's joey or baby koala, finally poked his head out last March, zookeepers noticed something unusual! The baby was an albino! An albino is an animal that has no color in its skin, hair, and eyes. Banjeeri's baby has white hair, with a slightly orange tint, red eyes, and a pink nose.

Zookeepers named the baby Onya Birri, which means "Ghost Boy" in a native Australian language. Onya Birri is the only albino koala that lives in a zoo.

from the Weekly Reader, Edition 4, September 1998, Issue 3, p. 1

Reading in action

Sample Activities and Tasks for fourth-grade students:

Students read the article "Ghost Boy" Born in San Diego and demonstrate their understanding of the story by:

- ✓ Creating a semantic map (see example at right.)
- ✓ Using the map to write a formal outline, which identifies title, a main idea, and three supporting details.

Title: "Ghost Boy" born in San Diego
A. Main Idea: A Nice Surprise

1. A baby koala is born
2. The baby is an albino
3. Its name is "Onya-Birri"

- ✓ Summarizing the article in their own words, using their outline.

- ✓ Generating questions that would lead to further, student-driven research.

- Why do they call a baby koala joey?
- Besides koalas and kangaroos, are there other marsupials?
- Is it okay that Onya-Birri is an albino? Is he healthy?
- What did Onya-Birri do for six months in his mother's pouch?



Connecting the standards and performance standards to curriculum ideas and specific classroom activities illustrates how Montana's state standards can be aligned to local curriculum and implemented in local classrooms. This "Reading in Action" card, which was assembled with the help of Montana teachers, shows a simple "Curriculum Connection." The Office of Public Instruction is asking teachers they are using that might help other educators implement the standards in their schools. Send your ideas to Beth Satre (e-mail: bsatre@state.mt.us; fax: 444-2893).

The reading in action section of the reading cards was compiled with the help of teachers from Cherry Valley School, Polson, and Great Falls Public Schools.

Plentywood implements a six-step process

In Plentywood, the plan to implement the state standards involves a six-step process that focuses on classroom instruction in each content area. "Implementation is a consuming process, and it probably should be if it's going to have any impact at all," observes states Plentywood High School Principal Dan Martin. Establishing timelines and reasonable expectations, however, makes the task more manageable. "We need to do this piece by piece," says Martin. "Philosophically, I think it would be a catastrophe to try and implement all of these standards, with all of their ramifications, at one time."

1. Sharing the knowledge

The first step in the six-step process is sharing the knowledge. Martin — who inhabits the role of curriculum coordinator in addition to his duties as principal — collects "all of the information [he] can get his hands on" about Montana's new academic standards and then distributes it to Plentywood educators.

2. Using a step-by-step process

Using the research collected in step one as a guide, Plentywood has developed a five-year, step-by-step plan for implementing the standards. Having a plan in place makes it easier to track and coordinate the various pieces, as

well as keep school district staff and board members informed. "That way, we kind of know where we are and where we're going," explains Martin.

3. Writing new course outlines

After receiving the information Martin distributes, all Plentywood teachers review the standards appropriate to their classes and write course outlines that connect the various learning activities with the benchmarks they address or fulfil.

This step accomplishes two things. First, says Martin, "Doing course outlines makes sure that teachers know and understand the standards. They have to work

with them and get to know them." Second, the course outlines represent the baseline data for the fourth step in the process.

4. Developing "Scope and Sequence"

During this step, teachers' course outlines will be compared across all grade levels. "By writing a scope and sequence, we can see where people might be doing activities in their classes that meet, for example, Standard 1, Benchmark 3," explains Martin. "That lets us identify the overlaps and the gaps and make sure each standard is covered accurately."

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What's happening in Kalispell?

In Kalispell, the state standards have served as a springboard for the local school district's planned curriculum work — work which encompasses staff development, assessment, and materials selection as well as curriculum development.

"The standards themselves fit well within the curriculum review process," states Dan Zorn, Kalispell Curriculum Director.

Use of the standards

Initially, explains Zorn, the Kalispell educators used the standards as a research tool to help both define best practices and determine what should be included in their district curriculum.

Working with their existing curriculum documents, they created worksheets for each content standard (see the example below) that list the Montana Benchmarks within that standard. Teachers then filled out the sheets, plugging the district's existing curriculum into the appropriate benchmark.

"We're doing that at each grade level and using that as a basis to ensure alignment," says Zorn. "We're trying to find the natural linkages from one grade level to another. We're trying to find the holes as well as places where we can trim, while looking at the standards and existing curricula as minimums." As they fill out the worksheets, teachers are also identifying and recording the resources already available in the district.

"The process has worked pretty well in math and reading, but it's been tougher in health enhancement," notes Zorn.

Curriculum Management Team
Coordinating the entire project is a district-wide

This form demonstrates how Kalispell teachers are using the benchmarks the state standards articulate to outline district curriculum and instructional practices. The example is for grade 10.

curriculum management team (CMT) of about 35 staff members that meets once a month for about an hour. Committee members were carefully selected so that all curriculum areas, all buildings, and all grade levels had representation. First-year teachers as well as "curriculum gurus" also have a presence on the CMT. "We tried to get the whole gamut of experience in the district," explains Zorn.

The CMT has been broken up into three sub-committees that have distinct, but related, purposes: Staff-Development Coordination, Curriculum-Development Coordination, and Assessment. CMT members also serve on curriculum review committees. This structure facilitates communication and enables greater coordination.

Emphasis on communication

"We have CMT members on all of our curriculum review committees. They all report progress to the CMT and take ideas from each other to make sure coordination is occurring,"

says Zorn. "Those meetings are a sharing time, a time to discuss, while the real work gets done in the curriculum review committees."

In addition to communication between the various curriculum review committees and the CMT, CMT members provide an avenue for

keeping all district staff apprised of the progress and decisions being made. Because every building has a representative, CMT members use time in staff meetings to report back to their colleagues.

To further increase understanding of the curriculum review process, Zorn has developed a PowerPoint presentation that he, as curriculum director, intends to present to staff in each of the

We're trying to find the natural linkages from one grade level to another. We're trying to find the holes as well as places where we can trim, while looking at the standards and existing curricula as minimums."

— Dan Zorn,
Curriculum Director for the
Kalispell Public Schools

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Content Standard 1 Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, and respond to what they read.				
Montana Benchmarks By the end of Grade 12	District #5 Goals & Objectives (Grade 10)	Suggested Materials	Example Lesson	Assessments
The student will 1. Make predictions and describe inferences and connections within material and between new material and previous information/experiences.	•Research historical setting, author's life, and cultural background of a short story or novel, compare and contrast the factual information with the portrayal of events, setting and characters in the literary work. •Make predictions about the way events and characters may change with a change in various aspects of the setting of a literary work. •Use evidence from a short story, novel or selection of nonfiction to draw inferences which are not directly stated in the writing. •Compare a work of literature to one's own life experiences	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> & <i>Julius Caesar</i>	•Research the courtrooms of the 1930's and the biography of Harper Lee. In a dramatic presentation, have the author visit the courtroom during the trial of Tom Robinson and comment on the defense provided by Atticus Finch in relation to her own life & personal views. •Use evidence from the novel to infer Harper Lee's responses to the trial. •Compare the trial to an example of someone in authority in your own life deciding guilt or innocence without due consideration of the facts.	•Bibliography of research. •Courtroom performance - evaluation on a rubric. •Analysis in responding to questions and in explaining the interpretation of the scene. •Selection of evidence rated. •Written or spoken example of real life judgments - scored in relation to connection to the novel.
2. Integrate new important print/nonprint information with their existing knowledge to draw conclusions and make application.	•Select an example of a word which has changed in meaning over time and use it to illustrate a principle of linguistic change.			
3. Provide oral, written, and/or artistic responses to ideas and feelings generated by the reading material, providing examples of the way these influence one's life and role in society	•Compose a personal response to a selection of literature which demonstrates the influence of the literature on one's own life.			
4. Demonstrate understanding of main ideas and formulate arguments using supporting evidence.	•Identify the main idea or theme of a work of literature or nonfiction and provide supporting evidence.			
5. Accurately paraphrase reading material, reflecting tone and point of view.	•Paraphrase information from a variety of sources and use the paraphrases in a research paper. •Paraphrase a portion of a scene from a literary work and maintain the tone & point of view of the original.			

Time and teacher burnout pose major concerns for districts

When asked to share his observations about the implementation process in his district, Laurel Superintendent Al McMilan replied, "Time is the most critical piece to do this right." Everyone interviewed voiced the same opinion.

Unfortunately, time is a rare commodity in all school districts. Carving time out of already overloaded schedules for curriculum review and planning without shorting classroom instruction is a herculean task.

Mary Johnson, Assistant to the Superintendent of the Browning Public Schools, says, "Preventing burnout on the part of teachers is a huge challenge. Our implementation work is currently an after school and Saturday thing. Our curriculum council worked Friday night and Saturday three weekends in March."

Time is in especially short supply in small, rural schools like Fort Benton and Ekalaka where everyone already wears more than one hat. Often the school calendar is less flexible as well. Ekalaka Superintendent Jule Walker notes, "Implementation requires quite a bit of time, and it's difficult to find the time during the school year because our community wants the school year to start the end of August and get out by Memorial Day. Our teachers need to take professional development days and get a substitute, and they don't really want to do that. They want to be in their classrooms."

Carl Somers, Fort Benton Superintendent, is hesitant to ask his staff to undertake the additional tasks related to curriculum work. He explains, "I have a really hard working

staff. I already have teachers here at 6:30 in the morning and at 9:00 at night. They're probably not working on curriculum; they're in here grading papers, preparing tests, and just making their classes go."

Teachers need to be involved

Every one interviewed agreed that teachers cannot be left out of the process. If standards implementation is going to make it to the classroom and result in improved learning and higher achievement, teachers need to play an integral role.

In Browning, people want their curriculum to be reflect the community and be specific to the school. "We feel that our people need to do the work, because they're the ones with the knowledge," notes Johnson.

Ultimately, teachers are responsible for what is taught to their students; they are the ones who actually implement the curriculum in their classrooms.

"Every teacher, has to be very, very familiar with the whole process, the product and the reason behind it," says Johnson. Fergus County Superintendent Shirley Barrick agrees. "I think it's very important that teachers have input into curriculum review and revision. If they have, they are more apt to implement the changed curriculum, because they understand the changes and see why those changes are important."

Strategies for doing the work

Different districts have developed different strategies to streamline the process and give teachers and staff the time and support they need to get the job done.

Some, like Great Falls,

Kalispell, and Polson, have been able to set aside the funds to hire curriculum coordinators. Many of the smaller, rural districts have joined curriculum consortia to help share the burden. (See story on page 5.) Browning and a few other districts have received grant funding and, as a result, can compensate teachers for their extra time. Still others have approached the schedule and release days with a creative eye. At Heart Butte, for example, school is in session from 8:30 to 3:30 every day, the slightly longer school days add up to one additional PIR day per month.

No matter what strategy or combination of strategies districts use, aligning local curriculum and implementing the standards is a time-consuming process. Superintendent McMilan notes, "Sometimes it's just a question of 'we're going to do it,' so we set aside the time."

Setting priorities

Dan Zorn, Kalispell Curriculum Director, says, "A lot of the resistance to the standards is how much time we have available. We have to make some decisions. ... We can't devote an hour every day to this."

Fort Benton Superintendent Carl Somers echoes that sentiment. "I would love to spend all my time sitting down and looking at the local curriculum, after all we're in education. But, look at everything that is involved in education; I have all kinds of things coming through my office."

As a result, many districts have arranged for more professional development for staff, and rethought their timelines, slowing their review cycles down. Despite bringing some relief to already overloaded schedules, a slower pace can cut down on resistance and enhance the involvement of both teachers and administrators and increase a community's commitment to implementation.

In Laurel, McMilan states, they've tried hard to create a process that addresses all aspects of implementation and actually involves — not just checks on or checks with — staff. "The only way that can happen," he notes, "is with time and involvement. You can't be too ambitious. You've got to take the core areas one at a time and spend time on them. So, it's going to take us about five to six years to get our core areas in place — math, communication, social studies, and science."

An alternative — which, though often mentioned, is quite contentious — would be to extend teachers' contacts into the summer or to include additional PIR days during the school year. Though vastly unpopular in many circles, others like Mary Johnson from Browning believe it only fitting.

"This is important work," says Johnson. "It shouldn't be left for after school and weekends. We should honor how important it is and take a week or two at the very minimum and tell our teachers,

'come in fresh, work hard, go home at a decent time.' Who else do we expect to do such important work on evenings and weekends?"

Local decision

As with implementing the standards themselves, school districts need to decide the approach that best fits their communities' needs and their teachers' schedules. The bottom line is to improve the education offered to Montana students. Even though it was difficult, if it equates to improved learning and higher student achievement, teachers, administrators, and parents will all agree that the time was well spent. ■

Preventing burnout on the part of teachers is a huge challenge. Our implementation work is currently an after school and Saturday thing. Our curriculum council worked Friday night and Saturday three weekends in March."

—Mary Johnson, Assistant to the Superintendent, Browning Public Schools

Standards in Action

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Great Falls Curriculum Director Alicia Moe says, "The value of the curriculum alignment process is that it allows teachers to be passionate about their area, reflect on the standards and curriculum, and pull together for the good of the kids." Moe believes that "the process of standards alignment and implementation is the best professional development possible."

Finding time and resources

As Kalispell Curriculum Director Dan Zorn notes, "In order to do it right, this standards implementation thing takes a lot of time." Time is a commodity that is in short supply in all school districts.

This presents a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, teachers want to be in the classroom, and they place a premium on the time they spend with their students. As a result, it is difficult to plan and hold meetings during the school day.

On the other hand, no one else can do the work for teachers.

The bottom line is that much of the standards work is taking place either after school or on weekends. And, often, without additional compensation. As a result, teacher burnout is a real concern in many of these districts. (See story above.)

Teacher turnover

In rural areas, high teacher turnover poses another challenge. In some areas, like the small country schools in Fergus County, turnover is a perennial issue. In others, a large majority of teachers are slated for retirement within the next five years. This could cause a loss of momentum, as districts bring their new teachers — many of whom will be in their first years of teaching — up to speed.

Terry Superintendent Mike Williams views future teacher turnover as a motivating force. Williams is leading the curriculum work for the Prairie View Cooperative. He has encouraged experienced teachers to set aside their initial reluctance in order to "provide a legacy for those students and teachers who will follow them."

The value of the curriculum alignment process is that it allows teachers to be passionate about their area, reflect on the standards and curriculum, and pull together for the good of the kids."

—Alicia Moe, Curriculum Director for the Great Falls Public Schools

First steps

Our small sampling indicated that exciting, exceptional work is occurring on the local level. It also serves as a reminder that a lot of work remains: the implementation process is just beginning. ■

Consortia help ease the challenges small schools face

Many of Montana's smaller schools have joined consortia or cooperatives to help them align their curriculum with state standards.

This allows rural educators and administrators to share expertise and resources, and avoid duplication of effort.

Guidance in curriculum work

"The big schools can hire curriculum directors," states Shirley Barrick. "But rural teachers are already worked to death, what with coaching and being responsible for every school activity. There just isn't time without guidance to sit at school and spend a few more hours working on curriculum."

The consortia, such as the Golden Triangle and Prairie View Cooperatives, offer a structure for schools and administrators to review their local curriculum. They give their members a place to start and help the process seem less immense.

"My staff is glad to have the stability and a guideline," notes Bruce Morrison, Heart Butte Superintendent. "That way they feel that they don't have to make up the whole wheel. All they have to do is take their part of it."

Working with other teachers

Also, Morrison notes, working

with the consortium gives rural teachers, who otherwise have little contact with their colleagues, the chance to "bounce ideas off other teachers." Mike Williams and Diane Fladmo from the Prairie View Cooperative in Southeastern Montana agree.

"I've heard many times from the teachers that they've really enjoyed having the opportunity to interact with their subject peers," says Fladmo.

"Having our teachers connect with each other and build a network of people they can contact for assistance brings great benefit beyond just discussing the task at hand," notes Williams.

School administrator's support

Consortia have to rise to certain challenges. One challenge is a product of a consortium's basic structure. In order to move forward, consortia rely on the support of the administrators in the local schools. It is the administrators who approve teachers' participation and release time and arrange for professional development. Ultimately, it is also the administrators who are responsible for implementation at the local level.

Both Prairie View and the Golden Triangle cooperatives have been working to keep the

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Taking charge of change

In addition to the other challenges posed by the process of implementing the standards, educators and administrators also face the natural resistance any change evokes. "Resistance to new stuff is just everywhere. It's classic," says Polson's Curriculum Director Sue McCormick.

Taking charge of change is a key element to successful school improvement. In 1987 Shirley Hord, William L. Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene Hall of the Southwest Education Development Laboratory conducted a study of how schools might improve successfully. In the course of that study, they verified the following characteristics of change.*

Change is a process, not an event. A persistent misconception is that change equates to handing over a new program, which is an event. Change is not an event; rather, it is a process occurring over time. Recognizing this is an essential prerequisite of successful implementation of change.

Change is accomplished by individuals. Change affects people, and their role in the process is of utmost importance. Therefore, individuals must be the focus of attention in implementing a new program. Only when each (or almost each) individual in a school has absorbed the improved practice can we say that the school has changed.

Change is a highly personal experience. Individuals are different, and each person reacts differently to a change. Change will be most successful when its support is geared to the needs of the individual users. If change is highly personal, then different responses and interventions will be required for different individuals. Paying attention to each individual's progress can enhance the improvement process.

Change involves developmental growth. Studies show that the feelings and skills of individuals involved in change tend to shift in respect to the new program or practice as individuals gain experience. Being able to diagnose and prescribe this growth can prove valuable for school leaders who are guiding and managing change.

Change is best understood in operational terms. Teachers and others will naturally relate to change or improvement in terms of what it will mean to them. How will it affect their current classroom practice? How much preparation time will it demand? By addressing these and other questions in concrete, practical terms, facilitators can communicate more relevantly and reduce resistance to improvement efforts.

The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations, and context. Often we view school improvement as a new curriculum, a new program, or package. But books, materials, and equipment alone do not make change; only people can make change by altering their behavior. Effective change facilitators work with people in an adaptive and systemic way, designing interventions for clients' needs and realizing that those needs exist in particular contexts and settings. This recognizes that the whole school will be affected by any action. Interventions in one area may produce unexpected results in another. Therefore, notions about the speed with which successful school improvement can be accomplished, the specific actions needed to achieve it, and even the shape that implemented change will ultimately take may have to be altered along the way. ■

* excerpted from MISTA Training Material, OPI/NWREL 1999

Curriculum review in Kalispell

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district's buildings. And, to give staff the opportunity to keep up-to-date, the district has also started to publish a *Curriculum Monitor*, which contains written updates from all of the working committees.

Meeting the challenges

Funding the curriculum review process and making sure that committee members have ample time to do their work are, of course, big issues. In Kalispell, committees can choose between using release time or being paid to meet outside the school day.

"That option keeps our people in front of our kids," says Zorn. All of the CMG meetings are outside the school day, but the curriculum review meetings vary.

Apart from money and time, technology integration, and terminology have caused some consternation.

The district has chosen to address the issue of technology as curricula are developed and materials are in place. "Then," Zorn says, "We plan to go back and look at that area from a technology perspective. Getting that going and making sure it works presents a challenge."

The language of the process has

also proven difficult. In discussions, explains Zorn, "People confuse materials with curriculum, or sometimes they want to turn the benchmarks into curriculum."

It is hard to communicate when everyone isn't speaking the same language, but Zorn believes that the standards worksheets have helped to clarify discussions. Also, everyone involved has started to make a concerted effort to use the terms in the same context.

"We're not developing 'benchmarks' in Kalispell," says Zorn. "We're developing our goals and objectives to meet the benchmarks in order to meet the state standards. We keep emphasizing that our job as a district is to provide the specifics — to decide what we are going to do to make sure our kids get to the benchmarks."

And, the process that Kalispell has developed seems to be doing that job.

Currently, the district is in the throes of mathematics, reading, and health enhancement. In those areas, they plan to have their curriculum guides aligned with the standards and be ready to begin looking at material selection next year. ■

Standards Framework FAQ

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School Improvement Initiative for educators, including regional and on-site workshops and other technical assistance and inservice efforts.

Where do we go from here?

With the completion of the standard, the statewide implementation of focused professional development opportunities, aligned state and local assessment system, research-based instructional methods, and parent and community involvement — Montana's good schools will continue to provide high quality education for all of Montana's students.

How to get involved

Through the building of the Montana Education Stakeholders, Montanans are strengthening professional partnerships. These

partnerships need you to be involved. What can you do? Here are some suggestions:

- Provide leadership to support the process;
- Participate in a process to review the draft standards;
- Participate in ongoing, intensive professional development;
- Participate in collaborative planning to design, implement, and assess instruction;
- Get involved at the local and state levels; and
- Contact Linda Vrooman Peterson for information about the Education Stakeholders (e-mail: lvpeterson@state.mt.us). ■

— Linda Vrooman Peterson, Administrator, OPI School Improvement Division

OPI's role: Information Clearinghouse

Schools want OPI to help them access resources and technical assistance as well as share their experiences with other schools

When asked how the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) could best support their efforts to align local curriculum and implement the state standards, the response was unanimous. Educators need easy access to good, reliable information, professional development opportunities, and a means to connect with other districts.

Sharing strategies

"This is not a process that comes naturally," says Dan Zorn, Kalispell Curriculum Director. "For the most part it's trial by fire; you jump in, flounder for awhile, and then

you happen on something." Hearing about strategies or processes that other school districts have developed can help.

"Learning what other schools have done is helpful — sharing both their process and some actual products — it's helped us move ahead," says Heart Butte Superintendent Bruce Morrison.

Polson's Curriculum Director Sue McCormick agrees and envisions OPI facilitating ongoing communication among districts.

"We would really like to network and stay connected to other people who are doing this work," she said. "To help us, OPI could be a node. We could call with questions and our challenges, and you could function as some kind of a clearinghouse,

giving us access to other people's learning."

Access to resources

Strategies employed by other districts are only part of the picture. Educators also need to know about research, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities on topics relevant to their local implementation process.

"Resource identification and access is very critical," says Laurel Superintendent Al McMilan. "If there's anything that OPI can do, it's to facilitate the identification of and access to resources that can support the various components of the process."

In Browning, for example, concern about actual implementation is growing. "We would benefit from information on what kind of strategies are working that move this piece from a written product to learning in a child's head," says Assistant to the Superintendent Mary Johnson.

Regional training

Mike Williams and Diane Fladmo from the Prairie View Cooperative urged OPI to make the creation of regional education centers a priority. That, they feel, would better allow access to coordinated efforts at training all across Montana.

Plentywood Principal Dan Martin agreed. "We need to have regional professional development for standards and everything else. Without that, we continue to isolate this part of the state."

Learning together

"We know what we need to do, but we are struggling with how we will make it happen," says Johnson. This statement reflects reality in many school districts. In helping disseminate information, OPI can help educators explore strategies, gather information, and develop processes that will work in local schools. ■

Cooperatives

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principals and superintendents of their member schools informed and involved in the process.

This year, Fred Seidensticker, Director of the Golden Triangle Cooperative, held two three-hour seminars for superintendents and principals. One seminar addressed the Montana standards and curriculum, the other assessment and both were well attended. Over 60 administrators attended the first, and about 40 came to the second.

"It's a little early to tell what kind of effect this will have. But, it's telling that administrators took the time to come and participate," says Seidensticker. In any case, he notes, "Those administrators are now more in the loop and better able to appreciate what their teachers are doing."

Distance and technology

Although consortia help relieve the isolation of their member schools, Montana's geography also poses its own challenge. "Prairie View has 12 schools, but

we take up an area that's bigger than most states," says Mike Williams. "The distances make it tough to get everyone together."

Technology is one way to breach that distance, and Seidensticker is enthused by the way that technology can help the implementation process. The consortium operates a Web site that serves as a reference and communication tool for teachers and administrators.

"Most of what they do is up on the Web page, so the teachers can refer back when they are doing their work here in Heart Butte," says Morrison.

Standards implementation

Although implementing the state standards is a local issue, curriculum cooperatives are playing a key role in Montana's rural areas.

In bringing teachers and administrators together, they are motivation as well as guidance, training, and structure for curriculum review in many of our state's smaller schools. ■

Summer Institute 2000

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The fine print

The Summer Institute 2000 will take place June 13-15 in Helena. Sponsors are the MASCD, the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA), the Helena Public Schools, and OPI. The registration fee is \$150, although MASCD and MREA members pay only \$135. The fee includes three breakfasts, three lunches, and refreshment breaks.

A preinstitute workshop, *Blocked Scheduled Schools Success Stories*, is scheduled for Monday, June 12, from 8:30 to 4:00 p.m. Nationally renowned educator

John Jay Bonstingl, President of the Center for Schools of Quality, will discuss the most current research and successful practices of blocked scheduled schools. What works? What doesn't? How can educators enhance the quality of instruction during the block. Registration for this day-long workshop is \$100.

To learn more ...

If you are interested or want to obtain more information or a registration form, please contact Dennie Munro, OPI (tel: 444-3114; dmunro@state.mt.us). ■

Plentywood's process

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Next year, the district plans to develop the scope and sequence for mathematics and science.

5. Evaluating both the process and classroom implementation

Because classroom instruction occupies the heart of this effort, the district is both requesting teachers' input and requiring their participation. This year, the district evaluation will include a section for teachers to comment on and suggest ways to improve the district's curricular work. Next year, teachers' will be assessed on their course outline in the course of their formal evaluations. "This is a way of documenting the district's work as well as holding teachers accountable for doing something," says Martin.

6. Including the draft standards in current work

The other five steps deal primarily with revising courses and curriculum that already exist. But, Plentywood is also working on designing and implementing a number of new, co-curricular programs such as School-To-Work, Tech-Prep, and a Title I reading program.

Even though some of the standards appropriate to those areas remain in the draft stage,

Martin finds it imperative that they be integrated as well.

Beyond the six-step plan

In addition to curricular work, Plentywood also has developed a professional development plan that lends itself to making the standards a focus.

"Two years ago, Plentywood adopted a portfolio of professional development that identifies 17 things that teachers can do for themselves that will improve work in their classroom," explains Martin. Teachers are required to select and complete eight of them. "Now teachers can pull the eight pieces together under a theme, like standards." This approach allows each teacher the autonomy to select their particular course activity to meet their individual interests and needs.

Martin is also looking beyond curriculum development to authentic assessment and the long-range effects this process will have on schools and teaching in Plentywood and across the state. He sees many challenges ahead, but believes that, in the end, the process will be both meaningful and useful.

"I think these standards will impact everything we will do," he states. ■

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